***Lamentations 4:1-11 How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered At the head of every street. 2The precious sons of Zion, Valuable as fine gold, How they are regarded as clay pots, The work of the hands of the potter! 3Even the jackals present their breasts To nurse their young; But the daughter of my people is cruel, Like ostriches in the wilderness. 4The tongue of the infant clings To the roof of its mouth for thirst; The young children ask for bread, But no one breaks it for them. 5Those who ate delicacies Are desolate in the streets; Those who were brought up in scarlet
Embrace ash heaps. 6The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people Is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, Which was overthrown in a moment, With no hand to help her! 7Her Nazirites were brighter than snow And whiter than milk; They were more ruddy in body than rubies, Like sapphire in their appearance. 8Now their appearance is blacker than soot; They go unrecognized in the streets; Their skin clings to their bones, It has become as dry as wood. 9Those slain by the sword are better off Than those who die of hunger; For these pine away, Stricken for lack of the fruits of the field. 10The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people. 11The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations.***

We’re back in Lamentations tonight, with Jeremiah the weeping prophet, looking at the fall of Judah and the overwhelming sadness the prophet feels for what he is seeing. He knows it is judgement and that the country has earned the wrath of God. So far in Lamentations, we’ve seen the prophet lament the former excellence of Judah, the miseries being endured, the derision of enemies, and his own suffering. But, we ended chapter three hearing his confidence that God is good and merciful, no matter what. Often, we forget to praise God for His goodness and mercy during the suffering. Let’s start with the prophet now as we look again at the suffering of Judah, as Babylon presses forward and Judah falls to conquest.

 Verses 1 & 2 *How the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered At the head of every street. 2The precious sons of Zion, Valuable as fine gold, How they are regarded as clay pots, The work of the hands of the potter!* ***How*** *the gold has become dim! How changed the fine gold! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered At the head of every street.*It’s important that we first acknowledge that there are two words for gold used in this verse. The first means something that shines and shimmers like gold. The second means the finest gold. All of this refers to the Temple of God built by King Solomon. 2 Chronicles 3 describes this Temple – gold overlays, precious stones, carved wood, fine materials of crimson, blue, and purple. It was a sight to behold! The Most Holy Place was overlaid in 600 talents of fine gold. A talent is 67 pounds – more than 20 tons of gold! Even the fasteners were made of gold. Billions of dollars in wealth… now lies in ruin, having been stripped and hauled away. The stones are rubble. But, the stones can have a dual meaning – that the cornerstones, the people that served honorably and diligently are gone. The golden times are a dim memory. This leads us into verse 2 *The precious sons of Zion, Valuable as fine gold, How they are regarded as clay pots, The work of the hands of the potter!*The priests, the prophets, the princes and kings that were once honored and honored God, their worth exceeding fine gold, vessels of honor and not a dishonor, are disgraced and hauled away to foreign lands. The shepherds are gone… the hirelings are in place. In many cases, we are seeing that in churches today. We see the vessels that are in place to honor God and His Word dishonoring God and His Word, giving into the world.

Verses 3-5 *Even the jackals present their breasts To nurse their young; But the daughter of my people is cruel, Like ostriches in the wilderness. 4The tongue of the infant clings To the roof of its mouth for thirst; The young children ask for bread, But no one breaks it for them. 5Those who ate delicacies Are desolate in the streets; Those who were brought up in scarlet
Embrace ash heaps.* ***Even*** *the jackals present their breasts To nurse their young; But the daughter of my people is cruel, Like ostriches in the wilderness.* The prophet is saying here that even wild animals and beasts care for their young, but the women of Jerusalem, through both choice and necessity, have come to disregard their children. He compares them to ostriches, which will leave the nest sometimes by necessity, allowing some of the eggs to become broken. *The tongue of the infant clings To the roof of its mouth for thirst; The young children ask for bread, But no one breaks it for them.* Food is so scarce that mothers are no able to nurse the infants, no matter how the babies cry and beg. There is no bread to give the children – parents have none for themselves. *Those who ate delicacies Are desolate in the streets; Those who were brought up in scarlet Embrace ash heaps.* People who lived wealthy lives, ate well, enjoyed the finer things of life, now sleep in the streets. Those that were dressed in the very finest clothes, scarlet being a sign of wealth, now embrace ash heaps and lie down in animal waste. This is a picture of complete social and economic collapse, as the siege of Jerusalem continues.

Verse 6 *The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people Is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, Which was overthrown in a moment, With no hand to help her!*. Sodom was destroyed in an instant, fire and brimstone raining from the sky. Jerusalem has suffered miseries - a long siege, famine, sickness, and armies attacking. The Sodomites all died at once. Jerusalem buried friends, family, children, watched them die terrible deaths. Many were then led away into captivity, leaving family behind not knowing their fate.

Verses 7-9 *Her Nazirites were brighter than snow And whiter than milk; They were more ruddy in body than rubies, Like sapphire in their appearance. 8Now their appearance is blacker than soot; They go unrecognized in the streets; Their skin clings to their bones, It has become as dry as wood. 9Those slain by the sword are better off Than those who die of hunger; For these pine away, Stricken for lack of the fruits of the field.* ***Her****Nazirites were brighter than snow And whiter than milk; They were more ruddy in body than rubies, Like sapphire in their appearance.* Theologians debate whether Nazirites means those separatedby a vow to God or princes and nobles. The Hebrew word is applied both ways in different verses. Regardless, these were her honored. Brighter than snow, whiter than milk refers to their complexion. This gives the impression of being sheltered from the sun and not working outside. *More ruddy in body than rubies, Like sapphire in their appearance* means that they are in great health, we’d say rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes. But, there is a change *Now their appearance is blacker than soot; They go unrecognized in the streets; Their skin clings to their bones, It has become as dry as wood.* The hardships of famine and lack of water has altered their complexion. They look dry and withered. *Those slain by the sword are better off Than those who die of hunger; For these pine away, Stricken for lack of the fruits of the field.* The prophet points out that being slain, simply killed by the sword, is better than this suffering. They pine away or waste away and die slowly, day by day, suffering in great misery. The pangs of hunger and famine producing far more physical and emotional pain than a sword or an arrow.

Verses 10-11 *The hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people. 11The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations.* ***The*** *hands of the compassionate women Have cooked their own children; They became food for them In the destruction of the daughter of my people.*The love between mother and child has been broken by the suffering. Mothers begin to eat their own children. Of course, we know that Moses prophesied this is Deuteronomy 28 as part of the curse for turning from God. *The Lord has fulfilled His fury, He has poured out His fierce anger. He kindled a fire in Zion, And it has devoured its foundations.* By deserting God, we bring wrath upon ourselves. If I were in subzero weather, in a warm house, safe with water and food, and I violently insisted to venture into the cold with only a t-shirt and shorts on, over the repeated warnings of my mother and father, no one would say, “Where was the house in all this? The house is to blame. The father is to blame.” No. People would say, “Richard is to blame. He was safe and warm and violently deserted that which kept him safe and warm.” Yet, when we violently desert God, exiting His protection, choosing the frigid darkness over His Warming Light, we tend to cast an accusing eye toward God when things go badly. Let us instead cast an accusing eye in the mirror at the real source of blame.

Next week, God willing, we will finish Lamentations 4. We’ll see that priests and princes are held accountable and kings are led away. As we pray for our nation, let’s be urgent, understanding that wealth, might, and status will not protect us in the times to come. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, trusting that He will see us through even unto death.